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The Visitor Economy: Making it a Career of Choice

A Literature Review

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Executive Summary

The visitor economy has faced significant workforce and skills challenges in recent years, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Industry consultations undertaken in 2021 for THRIVE 2030, the national visitor economy strategy, highlighted that workforce shortages were a significant barrier to recovery. *The Visitor Economy: Making it a Career of Choice* is a literature review conducted by Swinburne University, on solutions to workforce and skills challenges in the visitor economy.

Swinburne University conducted research which used the design thinking-type question: *How might we make the Australian visitor economy a preferred sector for the career of choice while building competitiveness and resilience of participating businesses?* Recognising the variety and complexity of work within the visitor economy, the scope of the review included visitor economies worldwide and other industries, to explore how solutions in these other contexts could be applied to Australia's visitor economy.

The report's findings are grouped into four areas: employment conditions, training, business models, and social and environmental impact. Key findings include:

1. To address skill shortages, high turnover, and other employment problems in the visitor economy it is necessary to offer employees better financial and non-financial employment conditions.
2. Increasing inclusiveness by employing people from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups is a tool for addressing the issues of skill shortages, that at the same time, provides opportunities for creating social impact, attracting new customers, opening new funding streams, and building competitive advantage.
3. Experienced and trained staff are needed, and skills need to be aligned with the changing requirements of employers. The use of accredited training programs, micro credentials and short courses, and strong collaboration with industry to improve responsiveness to changing training needs, will assist to meet this need.
4. Adaptive, system level business models (i.e., ways of creating value for stakeholders in a given industry and converting it into economic benefits for participating companies) are under-utilised in the visitor economy. The opportunity exists to use unique models to create value, solve stakeholder problems, and invest in place-based solutions.
5. As the expectations of customers, employees, and other stakeholders change, businesses could focus on creating value propositions that use, measure, and manage social and environmental impact as a source of value.

The report contains three case studies to demonstrate how these solutions may work in practice. Each case study was chosen to provide examples of successful implementation of proposed solutions. The case studies provide details about the adopted approach and its outcomes, highlight key learnings, and indicate how these are applicable to the Australian visitor economy. The three case studies are:

1. **Lemon Tree Hotel** (India) demonstrates how inclusion of an underrepresented group, in this case people with disability, can combat workforce shortages and how tailored training can lead to upskilling and retention.
2. **Sextantio Albergo Diffuso** (Italy) demonstrates how a place-based business model can remunerate stakeholders, generate a brand value and build a perception of high quality, while strengthening employment opportunities.
3. **Madga's Hotel** (Austria) demonstrates how corporate social responsibility can create a value position and build competitive advantage to attract visitors and employees.



The findings discussed in this report do not constitute an exclusive list. Acknowledging the limitations of this desk-top literature review, further exploration is recommended to refine and extend the findings.

Introduction

Australia's visitor economy comprises a wide range of industries that provide goods and services to visitors who travel to a destination for a variety of purposes including leisure, education, business, and employment. With over 300,000 businesses, the visitor economy includes: accommodation, transport, culture, art, sport and recreation, attractions and tourism services, education and training, business events, food services, and retail. Firms in the visitor economy account for 12.5 per cent of Australia's 2.4 million businesses and provide direct and indirect employment to 1 in 12 Australian workers. 95 per cent of Australia's visitor economy is composed of small businesses employing less than 20 people and was worth \$166 billion (in 2019).

The *Reimagining the Visitor Economy Expert Panel Report*, developed for the Australian Government in 2021, identified that while the visitor economy experienced fast growth in the decade between 2010 and 2020, it has faced challenges and systemic workforce issues. Issues included: the limited availability of Australian workforce, overreliance on temporary migrants, and high staff turnover. Additionally, the visitor economy has faced challenges related to volume, quality and age of connective and destination infrastructure, problems with adaptation of small firms to new technologies, social license to operate, changes in consumer preferences related to the increased focus on climate change, and environmental sustainability. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated these challenges, adding new problems such as severe financial stress.

THRIVE 2030's vision is that "Australia's visitor economy provides world-leading services and visitor experiences to consumers while delivering significant and sustainable benefits to the Australian community". To this end, THRIVE 2030 outlines "the visitor economy must build its future through diversifying its source markets, modernising its offer, assets, and workforce, and collaborating at all levels to do so".

Report Methodology

This study has taken a design thinking approach. By asking *How might we make the Australian visitor economy a preferred sector for the career of choice while building the competitiveness and resilience of participating businesses?*, this report provides findings on the complex workforce issues in the Australian visitor economy.

This study drew on a broad-based literature review that included academic, industry and practice-based publications. The aim was to identify approaches taken in Australia and overseas (within and outside of visitor economies) to address issues like those identified in the Australian visitor economy. Recognising the variety and complexity of the visitor economy and issues to be addressed, the scope of the review included visitor economies worldwide as well as other industries like construction, agriculture, and areas such as business models, social entrepreneurship, and social and environmental impact in order to provide new modelling and thinking.

The insights from this literature review were analysed by a multidisciplinary team from Swinburne University. Collectively, the team brings expertise from their diverse fields of specialisation including economics, business management, and social services. This analysis identified four focus areas to address workforce issues in the Australian visitor economy:

1. Employment conditions,
2. Training,
3. Business models, and
4. Social and environmental impact.



The findings discussed in this report do not constitute an exclusive list. Acknowledging the limitations of this desk-top literature review, further exploration based on primary data and design processes are recommended to refine and extend the findings.

Findings

Employment conditions

Previous reports and studies of the visitor economy identify both the financial and non-financial aspects of employment conditions as causes of the key problems in the visitor economy, from skill shortages to high turnover rates (Austrade, 2021, 2022). Improving these conditions is an important and necessary step on the way to making the visitor economy a place for a career of choice. This is especially important considering the recent and forecasted increases in costs of living, and as younger employees enter the industry with higher expectations of work/life balance. This review identified three areas of consideration for employment conditions:

1. Improve wages,
2. Improve non-financial working conditions, and
3. Increase inclusiveness.

Key learnings in this section

- Focusing on Living Wage instead of Minimum Wage as the industry standard when improving pay can be more effective in addressing chronic skill shortages and help build competitive advantage for businesses.
- Improving payment for employees needs to be considered together with strengthening resilience and profitability of businesses.
- Improving non-financial working conditions needs to include a mix of factors such as job variety, feedback and reward systems, flexible work practices, autonomy, career development, and empowerment, all within a work-life balanced environment.
- Listening to employees and involving them in decision-making can help meet the right mix of non-financial working condition factors, which is otherwise challenging given the diversity of workers in the visitor economy.
- The visitor economy provides opportunities for including employees from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.
- Including employees from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups can help to address the issues of skill shortages, as well as create social impact, attract new customers, open new funding streams, and be a source of competitive advantage.
- Including employees from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups may require partnering with organisations that provide specialised support.
- The visitor economy employers who want to develop inclusive strategies could benefit from the experience of Work Integrating Social Enterprises (WISE) and may find support through social entrepreneurship support organisations that are increasing across Australia.
- Designing new, innovative business models will help enact the solutions identified in the employment conditions action area.

IMPROVE WAGES

One option is to provide higher wages or ongoing positions, as the visitor economy has a reputation for low remuneration and irregular employment. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that wages are a principal cost factor for employers in a highly competitive market where paying more for staff will impact business overheads (Shah and Burke, 2003; Healy et al., 2011). Two strategies may help address this issue.

Firstly, it is helpful to change the way in which wages are perceived, moving away from seeing them purely as a cost factor and towards seeing them as a means of attracting talented staff that provide businesses with a competitive advantage.

A higher minimum wage can reduce vacancies and turnover instead of reducing jobs (Dube, 2019). Many businesses discover that committing to paying a living (not only minimum) wage provides important business benefits. An example is Scottish Eddrachilles Hotel accredited as a [Living Wage Foundation Employer](#). Since paying the Real Living Wage, they experienced better staff retention. More importantly, some employees decided to settle permanently in the area, something seen as a great achievement because the hotel experienced problems attracting people to the regional place where it operates (Eddrachilles Hotel, 2018).

Secondly, it is not possible to pay employees more without having a resilient and prospering business. Building resilience and healthy profitability of businesses is something that needs to be addressed together with wage increases. The business model and social and environmental impact sections of this report address these issues.

IMPROVE NON-FINANCIAL WORKING CONDITIONS

Further, non-financial conditions also need to be considered in order to make the visitor economy a career of choice, especially to attract and retain younger employees. Employers could include HR practices focused on increasing job variety, feedback and reward systems, flexible work practices, autonomy, career development, and empowerment, all within a work-life balanced environment (Chen and Choi, 2008). While this may be good managerial practice, employees can also offer good guidance to employers. Unfortunately, listening and developing an inclusive culture are often neglected mechanisms. More consultation and inclusion of employees in the decision-making processes and organisation of work may bring improved employment results and contribute to increasing profitability. An example of this comes from Cascade Engineering, a US medium-size firm working in manufacturing. Cascade Engineering developed an “Employer of Choice” strategy based on “high trust relationships with employees, sincere care for people, [and] humble listening with a willingness to be influenced by employee feedback” (Grant, 2014:30). As a result, they do not have problems with skill shortages and achieve retention rates far exceeding the industry average. More importantly, all employees contribute ideas that are an important source of innovation, competitiveness, and product development. While this example comes from outside of the visitor economy, Cascade Engineering works in conditions similar to many businesses in the visitor economy, by relying on many entry-level positions.

INCREASE INCLUSIVENESS

The visitor economy offers opportunities for including underrepresented and disadvantaged groups of employees due to flexible working times, variety, and an abundance of entry level jobs. Inclusion of underrepresented groups to address workforce shortages in the visitor economy is not new, and there is evidence that tapping into this cohort may help address skill shortages, create increased social impact, and as a result, become a source of competitive advantage (Ryan, 1981; Joppe, 2012). Further, doing so may also open new funding sources through impact investing, and new markets such as those created by new policies like social procurement. At the same time, this is contributing to building the visitor economy as a career of choice for more people. Underrepresented employee groups that could be considered include but is not limited to:

1. Indigenous people,
2. Migrants and refugees,
3. Older workers, especially older women,
4. People with disabilities,
5. Victims of domestic violence, and
6. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The business model section of this report and the three case studies show how inclusiveness can be applied to the visitor economy. Companies can make access and inclusion strategies a

key feature of their customer value proposition. For example, [Blindekuh](#) is a Swiss restaurant established in 1999 where guests eat in complete darkness served by staff who are all blind. Since 1999, this concept has spread to many countries. Further, technological advancements allow for employing underrepresented groups from remote areas or from overseas in services such as customer support, IT, recruitment and more. Genashtim, a Singapore-based company, employs 150 people across 20 countries, 70 per cent of whom are people with disabilities providing HR, IT, customer support, training and other services that are also applicable in the visitor economy. However, for most businesses, inclusivity is not considered as part of the company business model.

Including underrepresented and disadvantaged groups is not a simple solution. It may require special adaptation of the workplace and working conditions, and often the provision of wrap around services to allow staff to stay in employment. For example, victims of domestic violence may need psychological or legal help, and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds may need mentoring or substance abuse help. The needs vary among the different groups. Hence, while companies can include multiple underrepresented groups (please see the Lemon Tree case study), they usually start with focusing on just one.

Providing these additional services that enable employees stay in their positions may create costs. However, there are mechanisms that allow companies to deal with these costs. These include partnerships with NGOs that can provide special services in house through client-based support funding. For example, La Fageda is a Spanish dairy manufacturer employing people with mental illness and disability, including individuals with high needs. Set up by Christopher Columbus, a psychiatrist with a vision for inclusivity for people with disability, La Fageda provides a place of work for people with disability based in the region of La Garrotxa. The company has medical health and accommodation for their employees, partially covered by the local government, that saves money by not having to fund mental health institutions. Working for about 40 years, the company is providing alternative care for people in the region with intellectual disabilities.

Employers who want to develop inclusiveness strategies could benefit from the experience of Work Integrating Social Enterprises (WISE). WISE support underrepresented groups, they operate around the world and in Australia, including in the visitor economy. Australia also has a growing entrepreneurial ecosystem focused on supporting the development of WISE. Examples include [Westpac Foundation](#), and [White Box Enterprises](#), an accelerator with the aim of enabling 5,000 inclusive jobs by 2030. For example, [Hotel Housekeeping](#), a start-up company providing cleaning services and employing young, disadvantaged Australians, was accelerated by White Box Enterprises.

CASE 1. LEMON TREE HOTELS: EMBRACING DISABILITY INCLUSION TO COMBAT LABOUR SHORTAGE

CONTEXT

The Lemon Tree Hotels (LTH) was founded in 2002 and is India's largest, award winning, mid-priced hotel chain, catering to business and leisure travellers. The Lemon Tree successfully employs people with disabilities in all hotels and across all departments from front office, food and beverage, to the engineering and finance departments (Lal, 2022). The company first started a pilot scheme, but now, having seen the benefits of employing people with disabilities, inclusivity is an integral part of the company's culture.

APPROACH

LTH implemented an inclusion employment strategy as part of its business model in 2007 and integrated this with talent management and retention to ensure learning and development, career growth, and a fair environment for all employees living with disability. LTH developed 'job mapping' with different hiring guidelines for staff with different abilities. They partner with specialist NGOs to provide individually tailored training and run traineeships for new employees with diverse needs. LTH has also created their own Indian Sign Language (ISL) dictionary and all staff undertake sign language training as part of their learning and development.

LTH accesses government support and has workplace accommodation policies that range from work-from-home options to accessible facilities in the workplace, access to assistive devices, restructuring job roles, and flexible work schedules. LTH also undertakes structural adjustments to integrate workers with disabilities in a workspace.

OUTCOME

Due to the success of this inclusive approach, Lemon Tree has extended its inclusive strategy to other marginalised groups. Today, the hotel chain employs a total of 1,000 people from all marginalised segments of Indian society, including people with intellectual or physical disabilities, transgender people, widows, and survivors of acid attacks. This segment now accounts for one fifth of Lemon Tree's workforce. The organisation has a high retention rate, and the company's total income increased by 13.7 per cent from Rs. 49,207 lakhs in 2018 to Rs. 55,944 in 2019 (Lemon Tree Hotels Limited, 2020).

APPLICATION TO THE VISITOR ECONOMY

Businesses in the Australian visitor economy can employ disadvantaged and underrepresented groups to effectively address skills shortage and high turnover rates and create a career of choice for this cohort. Embedding inclusivity can lead to additional revenue and to attracting and retaining customers. All these benefits contribute to building competitive advantage and the positive brand image across the industry. Enhancing and embracing inclusivity is an important tool for the visitor economy but requires support mechanisms and partnerships to maximise effectiveness.

Training

Access to high quality and appropriate training is another important aspect of making the Australian visitor economy a career of choice. An important aspect to remember is that there needs to be an incentive for employees to undertake training, such as the possibility of quality and well-paid employment with options for a career pathway (Mitchell and Quirk, 2005; Richardson, 2007). This review identified two areas of consideration in the training area:

1. Improve the quality of training, and
2. Align training with changing industry needs.

Key learnings in this section

- Extended use of accreditations in training and education for the visitor economy can help increase the quality of providers and eliminate low quality training.
- Ongoing involvement of industry in the development and execution of the quality standards for such accreditations is important.
- Industry associations could lead the necessary dialogue to develop training modules required by the industry as their needs change.
- Increasing staff agility through reskilling and life-long learning are global trends in employment markets.
- Increasing the use of micro credentials and short courses, in addition to entire degrees, can help the visitor economy meet the changing needs of businesses.
- Collaboration among competing firms can provide a path for fast response to changing training needs and to addressing complex problems.

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TRAINING

High quality training is key to the development of a skilled, employable workforce which can also mitigate damages to the reputation of the visitor economy. This also helps employers who can save resources on in-house training and dealing with low productivity. Broad use of accreditations from providers of relevant training and education in the visitor economy could be one way of contributing to the elimination of bad quality training and assuring good training standards across the industry (Widarsyah et al., 2016). Many training institutions in the US see the benefits of such accreditations (Widarsyah et al., 2016). Accreditations such as those used by business schools (e.g., The European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), and the US-based Association of Advanced Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)) provide good examples. Ongoing inclusion of industry in the development and execution of the quality standards is important. Employers and industry associations can engage directly with their local education and training organisations to recommend new courses and changes to existing courses. Given the overhead costs to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from these negotiations, it would be a valuable service to members if industry associations took the lead in these negotiations.

The example of the Finnish education sector illustrates the importance of high-quality training to attract and retain qualified staff to the industry. Finland transitioned from an undistinguished education system in the 1980s to being the leading Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nation on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Teaching has become the career of choice for many Finnish graduates with only 1 in 10 applicants accepted to study to become teachers in Finnish primary schools (Sahlberg, 2011; Greufe, 2020). Teachers now earn higher than average wages in the labour market and have ongoing opportunities for professional development, which has also led to positive school climates and excellent quality education for Finnish children (Greufe, 2020; Sahlberg, 2011; Skedinger, 2016). Training in Finland is considered with a holistic view that supports the development of the profession and promotes its good reputation.

ALIGN TRAINING WITH CHANGING INDUSTRY NEEDS

The global labour market trends indicate an increasing need for staff agility, reskilling, and life-long learning (Hammer, 2021). The visitor economy is also subject to these trends. In particular, young people have very different work-life balance expectations, with stronger views about sustainability and the use of new technologies as key driving forces (Centre for the New Workforce, 2021). To make the visitor economy an attractive career option, it is necessary to ensure that training is agile and adjusted to rapidly changing consumer needs.

Increasing the use of micro credentials and short courses, in addition to degree qualifications for the visitor economy, is already under way. The Department for Innovation and Skills (DIS) of South Australia, initiated a pilot project offering a support service to develop micro-credentials. This pilot project addresses skills gaps in priority sectors and meets emerging industry needs (Regional Development Australia Eyre Peninsula Inc., 2021).

The construction industry in the UK, France, and Australia provides an example of an industry-wide response to training gaps, where key market actors (many of them competitors) came together with the education sector and set up a [Sustainability School](#) to ensure the development and provision of sustainability training for their suppliers. It rapidly developed from a collaboration between a few founding members for some targeted training to an international, industry-wide platform to help companies address the rapidly changing sustainability context in their industry. Sustainability School is also example of how large-scale problems (even beyond training) can be addressed through collaboration.

Business Models

Business models are often overlooked as possible solutions when addressing workforce issues because they are often defined as ways in which a company makes profits, and thus do not seem immediately relevant to address staff shortages or other labour market problems.

However, business models are engines of value creation that can enact company strategies and decide companies' market successes or failures. Business model innovations provide important tools in gaining a competitive advantage and addressing the long-standing labour related problems in the visitor economy.

This review identified three areas of consideration for business models:

1. Consider designing business model at supra-organisational level (industry and place-based),
2. Change the focus in the value creation logic from delivering service or product to solving problems of stakeholders, and
3. Include employees and local communities as target groups for value creation.

Key learnings in this section

- Business models are engines of value creation for all stakeholders, not only ways in which companies make profits.
- Designing and building business models for places (e.g., regions) or industries can build the resilience of regions and participating businesses, while delivering value for customers and other stakeholders.
- Business models designed for industries and regions provide new opportunities to offer better employment conditions and more attractive career pathways, where employees can train in a range of fields and move to different roles and businesses without the need to relocate.
- Business models designed for industries and regions open opportunities for using new mechanisms, such as employee sharing, enhancing collaboration among businesses in close geographic proximity.
- Designing value propositions focused on solving sets of problems and providing a comprehensive experience, rather than a product or service, is needed to meet growing expectations of customers, employees, and other stakeholders.
- Including employees and local communities as target groups that benefit from the value proposition of the business models (in the same way customers do) can help build more innovative business models.

CONSIDER DESIGNING BUSINESS MODEL AT SUPRA-ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL (INDUSTRY AND PLACE-BASED)

Traditionally business models, including in the visitor economy, are considered at the level of an organisation. This results in missing valuable connections between the different sectors, activities, and aspects of the market. The visitor economy is composed of multiple sectors and activities ranging from education, restaurants, accommodation, and transport. Designing and implementing business models from the perspective of an industry and place offers greater potential for making the visitor economy an attractive place of work, while at the same time building the strength and resilience of the entire industry and participating businesses.

An example of an industry-based approach to business models for the visitor economy is the cluster-based business model. This business model uses an industry-wide perspective to create a comprehensive value proposition for customers and fosters collaboration among businesses to deliver this proposition. It can be used with both large and small businesses. The South African company, [Fairview](#), is an example of what can be achieved with this business model. Based in Paarl Mountain, approximately 50 km from Cape Town, Fairview's core business is wine and cheese production. The cluster business model initiated by Fairview includes its fully owned bakery, tasting rooms, deli shop and restaurant, as well as a brewery created in partnership with a Swiss company and several independent businesses from the region, including a café,

restaurant, chocolate factory, distillery and pilates studio (Back et al., 2021). The customer value proposition, based on the products and services provided by the cluster businesses, is comprehensive and attractive. Their marketing strategy focused on the destination, rather than the separate business offerings, which centralised the advertising, reducing the cost to individual businesses.

At the same time, the cluster-based business model enabled Fairview to attract over 400,000 visitors per year since 2012 (Back et al., 2021). This volume of visitors and market success provided stable income for the involved businesses and created opportunities to offer better employment conditions to more employees. Using cluster-based business models creates cooperation among both complementary businesses and competitors and allows for cost savings in areas such as marketing. These savings can be used to offset staff salaries or training costs.

Another example of supra-organisational business models are place-based business models, such as those designed for regions. They use the specific characteristics of a place rather than existing industry actors to create a superior customer value proposition, which enables context-specific strategies to build a "sense of place". Both are important sources of value creation and competitive advantage. For example, the town of Bra in the Italian Piedmont region struggled with industrialisation, due to the extractive and polluting leather industry, but was known for its quality fine food. Love of good food created the "sense of place". Developing high quality food, educational programs, and festivals created economic resilience and positioned the town as a centre of the slow food movement (di Gregorio, 2017).

Place-based business models do not have to stay in one location and can be scaled. Coop Italia was created by associating nine large and about 100 small cooperatives and developed Italy's largest supermarket chain that has more than 1,200 stores and a revenue of €12.7 billion in 2013. The Coop Italia business model supports the slow food objectives and partners with different producers to offer co-branded food products that show the country's regional diversity. An important aspect of the Coop Italia business model is that it follows strict requirements in terms of quality, food growing, and production methods that need to be environmentally sustainable and ethical. In a similar way, Australia's place-based business models can be based on the cultural diversity and history of the country, including rich Indigenous cultures.

As the above examples illustrate, using an industry focused or a place-based business model helps to create a stronger economy, contributes to better employment conditions, and presents attractive career options where employees can learn different skills and move among different roles and businesses without the need to relocate. This is especially attractive in regional areas. Such business models help create an agile and flexible workforce and address the changing needs of employers. Mechanisms that can help build such business models include employee sharing, and use of partnerships and cooperatives as forms of organisation (Chen, 2021; De la Mora Velasco, 2021).

CHANGE THE FOCUS IN THE VALUE CREATION LOGIC FROM DELIVERING SERVICE OR PRODUCT TO SOLVING PROBLEMS OF STAKEHOLDERS

To develop industry and place-based business models it is necessary for the customer value proposition to extend from providing products and services to providing whole trip experiences. Today's customers often look for comprehensive solutions to traveling rather than a single service. This contributes to the success of platforms such as Airbnb or changes to business models introduced by companies like Qantas that is offering a complete travel solution, rather than an airline ticket booking service.

The same approach can be used in thinking about employees. This can be achieved by designing value propositions for them in the same way we design value propositions for the customers. This is what Lemon Tree Hotels did to include people with disabilities into their workforce. The Lemon Tree case study provides further details.

INCLUDE EMPLOYEES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES AS TARGET GROUPS FOR VALUE CREATION

Business models can be used to create value for multiple stakeholder groups, not just for the customers (Lüdeke-Freund and Dembek, 2017). Designing value propositions and business models for multiple groups at a time may seem challenging but it can also deliver innovation and competitive advantage. Doing so can make businesses more engaged with the local community and creates better places of work where employees want to contribute and stay.

La Fageda, a Spanish dairy company, designed their business model around creating value (i.e., providing wellbeing) for people with disability and neurodiversity, their families, and local communities. The business model considered the location of the company in the region of La Garrotxa, the product offerings, and other details to provide therapeutic conditions and wellbeing for people with disability. La Fageda has become an attractive place of work for many locals both with and without disability. Some do not want to leave the job, even for one that is better paid (Gonzalez, 2013). The company has also become the third largest dairy company, by market share, in the Catalunya region, behind Nestle and Danone (Gonzalez, 2013). Being a specialist dairy with its own farm, the company holds open days to the public attracting over 10,000 visitors per year to the region, contributing in yet another way to building a resilient local economy. La Fageda shows that focusing on creating wellbeing and supporting the needs of the employees as a key component of their business model can result in greater employee retention.

CASE 2. SEXTANTIO ALBERGO DIFFUSO: A PLACE-BASED BUSINESS MODEL TO REGENERATE TOURISM

CONTEXT

Place-based business (PBB) Models in the global hospitality market are creating a portfolio of distinctive hotel resources with a sustainable competitive advantage. They have employed a context-specific and market-driven approach to creating a successful tourism product that is linked to a "sense of place".

APPROACH

In the 1990s, a Swedish-Italian entrepreneur purchased a series of dilapidated structures in the Italian village of Abruzzo at a time when the whole village had suffered from depopulation as residents moved to larger cities in search of work. He restored these structures to form Sextantio, a company based on a new business model called the Albergo Diffuso (AD) meaning "diffused hotel", which consists of a series of lodging, dining and entertainment businesses that are operationally integrated but physically dispersed in the historic village. AD is a place-based business model in which entrepreneurs use location-specific resources to create value, thereby both profiting from and contributing to a "sense of place" as a tourism destination and an important source of competitive advantage.

The Sextantio committed to saving the elements of the local identity including architecture, cultures, cuisine, the history, and landscape, involving local communities and the economies as stakeholders, to promote the local visitor economy as a place for career of choice. They created a brand that represents a luxury hotel in hospitality tourism, sharing a completely new perspective using different local resources and implementing strategies that cannot be replicated by competitors.

OUTCOME

The Sextantio model garnered praise in international media such as The New York Times, The Guardian, and National Geographic Traveller. It attracts employees who value socially conscious enterprises (Powell & Osborne, 2020) and enjoyed increased earnings as a result of the brand value it generated (Iannone and Marcella, 2019).

APPLICATION TO THE VISITOR ECONOMY

The case study shows how businesses can create an innovative tourism product to engage visitors and employees who are increasingly looking for sustainability options in their travel and workplaces. The Australian visitor economy should embrace these sustainable practices to remain relevant, competitive, and viable. The place-based business models, such as AD, enhance local economic resilience. In response to the long-term impacts created by COVID-19 on the visitor economy, entrepreneurs could focus on adopting successful place-based business models, such as AD model, to withstand the crisis and enhance socio-economic and environmental sustainability of tourist destinations and the industry itself.

Social and environmental impact

Social and environmental impacts have become an integral part of business management with market and regulatory trends increasingly focused on sustainable development and environmental footprint. Creating and communicating impacts helps companies get ahead of the competition and attract a new funding. Impact investing is rapidly becoming the fastest developing area of investment. The visitor economy is not an exception when it comes to relevance of impact. Customers in the visitor economy are increasingly concerned about the impact to which their money contributes. Similarly, people seeking work, particularly the Gen Z age group, are looking for meaningful employment where they can contribute to positive social and environmental change through their work. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted with a recent study by Goh and Baum (2021:1688) finding that “meaningful work such as making the world safer and going beyond the call of duty was a key motivating factor behind a willingness to work in quarantine hotels”. Hence, impact emerges as a possible tool for building industry competitiveness and resilience and can be an opportunity to attract workers to the visitor economy as career of choice, especially as more Gen Z people enter this industry. This review identified two areas of consideration for social and environmental impact:

1. Use social and environmental impact as a source of value, and
2. Measure and manage the impact created.

Key learnings in this section

- To convert impact into value, it is necessary to actively measure and evaluate impact as part of the business strategy.
- Including disadvantaged and underrepresented groups in the workforce of the visitor economy can be a way of creating positive social impact. The wellbeing outcome created by doing so is valued by customers and other stakeholders.
- Creating a positive environmental impact and contributing to the regeneration of natural ecosystems is a source of customer value and in the long term, supports a healthier ecosystem that the visitor economy depends on.
- Philanthropy as part of the business model can be a good value proposition when used strategically to create positive social or environmental impact.
- There are many existing tools and organisations that can help businesses to measure and manage their social and environmental impacts. They include BLab, who use a recognisable brand like BCorp certification, to inform customers and other stakeholders how they company is creating a positive impact.

USE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AS A SOURCE OF VALUE

Business owners often see the creation of positive social or environmental impact as a cost. However, it can be a source of value for the customers, employees, and the company itself, increasing rather than lowering profitability. The key for converting impact into value is being familiar with the concerns and ways of perceiving the world of those whom the value proposition is designed for and targeting the business model accordingly (Dembek and York, 2019).

Examples such as La Fageda and Lemon Tree (see the case study) show how including people with physical and mental disability in the workforce attracts new customers and contributes to customer loyalty. Integrating other disadvantaged and underrepresented groups such as refugees (see Magdas Hotel case study), at risk youth, or older women can, in a similar way, contribute to positive social impact in the visitor economy. The case studies and examples in this report show that inclusiveness and integrating disadvantaged groups as a business strategy is perceived positively by employees and customers alike and can lead to better employee retention and customer loyalty. The visitor economy offers many entry level job opportunities, flexible working times, and other features of employment that are suitable when considering social impact through inclusiveness as a value proposition.

To include social impact successfully into a business model, inclusive employment practices need to be considered with the wellbeing of all staff in order to achieve the desired value proposition (it is the wellbeing outcome not the fact of providing employment that counts and is valued). The Spanish [Artiem Hotels](#) is an example of how this is applied in the visitor economy. Artiem have made the 'search for happiness' the basis of their business culture and pride themselves on being certified as a 'Great Place to Work', which attracts and retains talent as well as customers.

There are many other important areas where positive social and environmental impact can be converted to value for stakeholders and the company. Caring for and actively managing the environmental footprint of the business is one such methodology, as many companies in the visitor economy can impact the environment negatively due to the nature of their operations. Technology and innovation can be used as tools to manage these issues. These tools can be used to monitor consumption and can help to save water, reduce waste, and increase the use of renewable energy improving environmental impact and converting it into value. The Thai company [Energaia](#) partners with hotels in Bangkok to grow spirulina, tiny algae considered a superfood, on their roofs. The company sells spirulina and products such as spirulina pasta internationally and the hotels use it in their kitchens, diversifying their menus and attracting environment and health-conscious customers.

Philanthropy, when used strategically, can also be an excellent mechanism for converting both social and environmental impact into a value proposition for employees, customers, and businesses. Donating to relevant causes can help address local social issues and engage meaningfully with local communities, offset emissions, and contribute to projects that regenerate ecosystems. It can involve cash donations or in-kind contributions, such as employee volunteering with local community organisations. The US [Legacy Vacation Resorts](#) uses philanthropy as a strategy to create impact and value. They donate to protect the environment and 12 per cent of their customers accept it as an additional value proposition and participate by contributing with their own donations. Legacy Vacation Resorts also support employee volunteering and 40 per cent of all employees are actively involved in working on different projects, creating value for communities, and contributing to the company's license to operate. In addition, volunteering was shown to be positively related to job satisfaction.

Finally, considering support to regenerate natural ecosystems, such as the Great Barrier Reef, is an opportunity for creating positive environmental and social impact. Further, it is also a necessity for many businesses because their very existence depends directly on the health of these ecosystems (Biggs, 2011).

MEASURE AND MANAGE IMPACT CREATED

However, it is not sufficient to just be involved in impact creating strategies. To convert impact to value, it is necessary to actively measure and manage the impact created. This ensures that businesses are aware of the results of their actions and can manage the risks of unintended consequences, as well as build credibility by providing proof that they are genuine in what they do. This is important especially with younger employees and customers, who often demand proof of impact in order to value it. TOMS Shoes' experience shows the importance of continuous measurement and management of impact. TOMS was built on the idea of creating impact by using the 'buy one, give one' business model. That is, for each pair of purchased shoes, one pair was donated to people in need in developing countries. This was supposed to create changes such as better health and education outcomes. Initially this was working well. However, the company did not implement an ongoing impact measurement and did not monitor closely enough the concerns of their customers. This forced the company to be defensive and reactive as external studies showed negative, unintended consequences such as more reliance by the beneficiaries in developing countries on donations. Also, the new generation of customers demanded proof of the benefits achieved and over time, shifted their concerns and interest from developing countries to local problems. The company had to change its business model completely after experiencing financial hardship. This provides a lesson for firms in the

visitor economy to monitor both the impact of their activities and how this impact is perceived by the relevant stakeholders. This will help businesses to be proactive rather than defensive and reactive to changes.

There are many tools for impact measurement and management. For example, increasing numbers of firms in the visitor economy worldwide choose to become certified BCorps. The certification is provided by [BLab \(that also operates in Australia\)](#) and provides measurement and support in continuous improvement of the business's impact. In addition, it provides access to a global community of BCorps (currently over 5,000 small, medium, and large companies), creating opportunities for knowledge sharing and business through in-community trading. Companies can find likeminded new suppliers and customers there. Businesses can also use impact measurement tools by joining other global communities such as [GIIN](#), oriented on impact investing, and [GRI](#), providing the most accepted sustainability measurement and reporting system, and [Integrated Reporting Initiative](#).

CASE 3. MAGDA'S HOTEL: EMPLOYING REFUGEES TO COMBAT LABOUR SHORTAGE

CONTEXT

Magda's Hotel, a tourism social enterprise in Vienna, is an inclusive business model, supporting employment of refugees as source of value creation along with social justice. Magda's business model aims to address economic, social, and environmental problems using entrepreneurial tools to maximise social benefits while engaging refugees as a solution for labour shortage (Alomari, 2021).

APPROACH

Caritas Austria in partnership with a group of refugees and tourism professionals created Magda's Hotel in Vienna, Austria in 2015. The Hotel's mission is to integrate refugees and migrants through employment and training, creating a career path for participants. Austria's Asylum Act (IOM, 2015) allows refugees to gain work permits in Austria.

Magda's has achieved a high retention rate, adopting a hybrid recruitment model that combines job shadowing, mentorship, paid training/internship, free meals, fair remunerations, and extra tips from the hotel guests. Refugee workers can also access external training courses as needed for specific skill development such as language. A social worker is available to provide social/emotional support to refugees to adapt to the work environment, culture, and society.

OUTCOME

The refugee employees contribute to the Hotel in three ways by helping:

1. To create a satisfying tourist experience,
2. To build business enhancement and reputation /brand image,
3. To be an asset for their employer.

Magda's uses their refugee employees' diverse culture and languages to help them better serve their customers and have developed a reputation as a truly international including to attract more than 22,000 international customers in 2016.

APPLICATION TO THE VISITOR ECONOMY

Refugees could provide a workforce for employers in the Australian visitor economy, with the right legal environment and tailored training opportunities. Employers can consider refugees as long-term workers since a high percentage of them tend to permanently stay in the receiving countries (Tayfun, 2021). Further, by combining social and environmental interests in their operations and communication, businesses can attract visitors who value a holistic social enterprise.

Conclusions

Findings in this report provide insights into opportunities to build workforce capability in the visitor economy. The findings are not an exhaustive list. To have a sustainable Australian visitor economy that provides “world-leading services and visitor experiences to consumers while delivering significant and sustainable benefits to the Australian community” (THRIVE 2030 visitor economy strategy), industry must offer viable career choices where businesses are resilient and competitive.

This report recommends a system-level, holistic and human-centered approach, rather than targeting specific problems. Case studies and examples in this review provide examples using models from different cultural perspectives. This study acknowledges it is the responsibility of all actors involved in the visitor economy not just single companies, sectors, or governments to create and deliver the required action.

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BLab - <https://bcorporation.com.au/>

Blindekuh - <https://www.blindekuh.ch/restaurant-in-the-dark-blindekuh-zurich.html>

Energaia - <https://energaia.com/>

Fairview - <https://www.fairview.co.za/>

Genashtim - <https://genashtim.com/>

Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) - <https://thegiin.org/>

Global Reporting Initiative, (GRI) - <https://www.globalreporting.org/>

Hotel Housekeeping - <https://www.hotelhousekeeping.com.au/>

Integrated Reporting Initiative - <https://www.integratedreporting.org/>

Legacy Vacation Resorts - <https://www.legacyvacationresorts.com/>

Living Wage Foundation Employer - <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/>

Sustainability School - <https://www.supplychainschool.org.au/> and
<https://www.supplychainschool.co.uk/>

TOMS Shoes - <https://www.toms.com/>

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